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The Call of the Heights

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THE CALL OF THE HEIGHTS

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THE CALL OF THE HEIGHTS

ECHOES FROM THE LETTER TO
THE PHILIPPIANS

BY

STEPHEN A. NORTON

THE PILGRIM PRESS
BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO



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BEING SAINTS

TO all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi.... Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you... for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now. . . . I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yea, I beseech thee also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

— LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

THE CALL OF THE HEIGHTS

I

BEING SAINTS

THE call came first to a company of saints at Philippi. Saints are commonly supposed to be already on the heights. These saints, on the contrary, were just facing the ascent, not yet seeing clearly their goal. They were very human saints, and all the more saints for their humanness. They were not the saints of the cloister, shut away from the affairs of the workaday world; among them were Lydia the merchant, and Clement the “fellow-worker,” and other busy people. They were not saints by virtue of penance and self-torture; none of them had stood for thirty years on a pillar,

“Battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayers,” to win the meed of saints. Nobody had as yet so misread the Master’s rule of humility. They were not saints as having attained to perfection of character; Euodia and Syntyche were of their number, who could not quite live at peace with each other, and

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must be exhorted thereto in this loving epistle. They were saints because they had honestly set their faces toward the light and love of God. They were saints by anticipation; sometime they would reach the goal of character and be truly saints. Paul took them at the face value of their purposes, as God takes us all, according to the doctrine of justification. So these men and women just out of heathenism are "saints" in the courteous address of Paul; and no doubt his address helped them to be saints. They are "the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi." Philippi was as unpromising soil for saints as could easily be found. One would think that Paul's recollections of Philippi with its initial coldness and indifference, followed by scourging and the stocks, would have suggested satanic rather than saintly images. But as Dr. Jowett observes, "Saints are reared in unlikely neighborhoods." They sprang up on the barren soil of Philippi, and, blending their blossoms and fragrance, live in history.

For they helped to make history, these saints at Philippi. They became an effective element in a movement which touched the Western world first in their city, and then swept over Europe and across the ocean to America, — the movement we call Western

Civilization, identical with the march of the gospel and the Church. That movement began when a traveling missionary, finding his way hedged up in Asia Minor, stood looking across the Ægean at Troas, and then laid him down to sleep. In sleep he saw a vision: a man of Macedonia stood on the shore of that Western world yonder and beckoned to him, and cried, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us." He was a man of sensitive soul, as missionaries and all who would help need to be, and he gathered at once that divine errands were appointed him across the blue Ægean.

I wish we might see him as he stands there on the shore looking eagerly toward Europe. He is on historic ground, the scene of Priam's ancient reign, which Homer sang; on ground trampled once and again by armies of conquest. Great captains have stood where he stands, with vast plans of world conquest in their hearts. But their plans sink into insignificance before the enterprise of this obscure Jew about to set foot in Europe. He will work greater changes than did the armies of Xerxes and of Alexander. He heralds the conquest of the West for Christ. I wish we knew the name of the boat which carried him across the Ægean, as we know that on which he later sailed the Mediterranean. "Chris-

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tophera" it might well have been, and more worthy of memorial than the "May-flower," whose significance was in the fact that it carried on to the new world the dynamic Paul brought to Europe for the making of saints.

No welcome awaited him. He might easily have concluded that the vision and the voyage were a mistake. The city turned a deaf ear to his words. But outside the city by the riverside, where was a place of prayer, a little company of women were ready to hear his message. The heart of one of them, like the heart of John Wesley that memorable evening in Aldersgate Street, "was strangely warmed," and in her house was soon gathered the nucleus of the company of saints who later received this gracious letter. Ah, if one could tell in few words what women have done to lift the world toward saintliness! This letter is a tribute to Christian womanhood. If its opening paragraph recalls that "first day" by the riverside, its last entreats, "Help these women, for they labored with me in the gospel." Christianity wrought a great deliverance for woman when it gave her freedom and a place of highest honor; and right royally has she repaid the debt by giving the strength of her redeemed womanhood

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to the Redeemer and his work. She did it at Philippi, and helped to create a fellowship of service for which Paul says he makes supplication with joy.

Philippi is known in Roman history as the scene of a great battle whose result established imperialism as the policy of the empire, a policy which carried disintegration and death in its train. But Philippi is known in Christian history as the scene of the origin of a movement which carried democracy, brotherhood, and the ideals of righteousness into all the Western world. The beginning of that movement was the gathering of a little company who were called to be saints. The world feels their power and rejoices in their sainthood to this day.

LIVING TOGETHER

*I*F there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. *Hare this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*

— LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

II

LIVING TOGETHER

THE most pressing problem of every-day life, from which even saints are not delivered, is the problem of living together. It means much for a community when a company is drawn together for high purposes; it means more for the company if the drawing together becomes the revelation of the secret of happy social life. Paul did great things for Macedonia and for the West when he brought Christianity to Philippi. But the really great thing he did was to bring responsive people together in a new fellowship where they should learn to live on a tolerable basis of mutual helpfulness. And no sooner has he recalled their status as saints than he proceeds to develop the plan according to which saints are to make social life blessed. That plan is summarized in a single sentence, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Their social relations were to be Christian; their fellowship like their saintship was "in Christ Jesus." Anything foreign to his

mind and spirit is foreign to the fellowship. The sociology of this letter is summed up in a spirit of loving unity — “being of one accord, of one mind.”

I think we shall like to read again in modern English the plea Paul makes for this spirit: “If any encouragement comes through union with Christ, if there is any persuasive power in love, if there is any communion with the Spirit, if there is any tenderness or pity . . . live together in mutual love, one in heart, moved by one spirit.” What an array of motives are combined in the plea!

Here is the motive drawn from experience: If you get any encouragement from union with Christ, from communion with the Divine Spirit, let that inspire you to cultivate the spirit of mutual love among yourselves. He was appealing to the deepest thing in their lives. Any encouragement from union with Christ! All the courage they had in leaving heathenism for saintship came from that union. They had dared to undertake the Christian life because they had the encouragement of the Christian’s Saviour, who had sought them and called them and said to them, “I am your friend.” Any communion with the Holy Spirit! Every prayer for help they offered was breathed in

his strength; every desire they knew to get away from the old darkness of superstition and into the light of God was his inbreathing:

“Every thought of holiness was his alone.”

The very substance of their Christian experience was in the plea: “By the help of the Christ and the Spirit give you in love do you love the brethren.” They understood the plea to mean: “If there is reality in your relation with Christ, show your appreciation of it in your relations with others.”

Then the appeal comes on the purely human side: “By the persuasive power of love, by the spirit of tenderness and pity, come into relations of love with those who so often need your compassion.” We are not too much given in our Western world to the heart life. We talk much about the value of “hard sense” — often it is very hard indeed. We think the kingdom of heaven is to be brought in by cold intellectuality. We will argue people into righteousness and conformity to good order. And we leave out the things that mean most and reach deepest — the persuasive power of love and the spirit of tenderness. The thing most needed in the social life of the world is the touch of human kindness, the spirit of loving compassion. If you had the world socially

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organized today along the lines of strict justice, while tenderness was outlawed, you could not run the social order for a day. Hearts are as often hungry as stomachs. The thing most needed is the loving human touch. Everybody has felt the need. Maybe it was long ago; so long ago that one has tried to persuade himself it never was at all. But sometime we have been in dire need of friendliness, of sympathy, of gentle courtesy. Our spirits have been lonely and depressed; we wanted the persuasiveness of love, the touch of tenderness. Did we find this? Oh, then, by the memory of that great boon, let us show this! Others are as we were; they want just what found us and saved us from despair. Because of the blessedness of love's ministry which we have known at some time, we are to make love's ministry real in social life.

But how to do it — there's the rub. It is easy to summon the spirit of love, but will it come? This letter offers some very human suggestions for bringing it. Some things are in the way; remove them. In order to bring copious streams of refreshment into western orchards, and so to secure fertility and fruit, men make channels for the water and remove hindrances from the way. We must treat our social gardens so. Love, like

water, will flow when a channel is made. Put aside obstructions: "Let nothing be done through faction" — the method of clique and clannishness prevents the flow of love. "Let nothing be done through vainglory" — motives of personal vanity clog the channels of kindness. "Diotrepes, who loveth to have the preeminence," spoils the fellowship. Humility conditions social blessedness; God makes it a channel of grace — a way for the streams of love. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings" — without criticism and faultfinding. There is a beautiful word much used in literature today which meets the case, the word "appreciation." Instead of a biography somebody writes an "appreciation" of a man. He looks for the strong and worthy elements in the man's character and work, and puts them together, that the world may see what is worth appreciating in the man. Of course the man has made mistakes — that is only to say he is like the rest of us. But what is the use of dwelling on mistakes? They are common enough, and discouraging enough. Let us find the helpful things; let us write an appreciation; let us make obvious the good. "Beware of dogs," warns our author. A "dog" in his language is a "cynic." Beware of the narrow, cynical mood that finds no good in

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others; it shuts out love from our own hearts, and does its best to shut it out of other hearts. If all these obstructions are lifted, then the way is open for streams of loving fellowship to flow through all the social field. So it did flow through the field of the early Christians. Onlookers said, "Behold how these Christians love one another." And many sought the fellowship of love.

THE CALL OF THE HEIGHTS

NOT that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded. . . . Brethren, be ye imitators together of me, and mark them that so walk even as ye have us for an ensample.

— LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

III

THE CALL OF THE HEIGHTS

STANGE that a letter from a prison should be the very song of the lark,

“—Whose notes do beat
The vaulty heavens, so high above our heads.”

For no “herald of the morn” ever summoned to the heights with clearer note and sweeter invitation than does this aspiring spirit, unhindered by prison shackles. For him there are visions which eye hath not seen, and music which ear hath not heard. There is an ineffable fellowship to be found: “That I may know Him” is an ideal ever beckoning upward.

Strange that this note comes from a prison? Sorrow and solitude have taught many souls aspiration and sweetness. Was not the book which next to the Bible has inspired and comforted pilgrims through this world written in Bedford jail? And has not our own generation heard one of the sweetest notes of optimism from a soul behind the prison-bars of darkened eyes and deaf ears? Paul

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and Bunyan and Helen Keller are enough to put to shame the notion that we are dependent on circumstances for light and flight, that conditions give quality to souls. Their songs in the darkness have set many prisoners singing, and made them "prisoners of hope."

To heed the call of the heights means to break with the past; it means to forsake dependence on lower forces. It is to hear again the old prophet, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" One hesitates to turn for illustration from the old prophet to the modern navigator of the air whose ships are so unsteady; but enough has been achieved to suggest that if one will mount toward heaven with purpose and direction he must forsake steel roadways and mogul engines and trust to more ethereal forces. The "high calling of God" is not answered by traditions.

External privileges do not greatly help heavenward. The writer of this inspiring letter had tried them. The hoary system of legalism on which his people counted with such assurance he had found of no avail. What things were gain to him he counted loss when he looked to the heights. And after long years of struggle upward he counts

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himself not yet to have attained. The past with all its helps and hindrances, with all its labors of love and prayers of faith, with all it has brought him in his splendid manhood — he would forget it all, because the heights are still above him and the call upward is still ringing in his ears.

That is a wholesome attitude for any of us. To have set forth to climb the mountain is not to have reached the summit. The beginning is exhilarating because it looks toward the heights, as to begin a course of study is inspiring because it carries the hope of graduation with honor. Christian life and service are a journey and a curriculum. "Follow me," said the Master. "Learn of me," he added. To follow and to learn is more than to begin. Humility becomes us in the presence of the man who wrote this letter. For think what honors he had relinquished and what ignominy he had suffered for his Lord. Think of his high faith and consecration, of his overflowing heart of love toward the little Christian groups he had formed at the sacrifice of his earthly all. Think of his soul open to all the light of God; think of his great, manly, spiritual stature; think of him waiting there in prison, in patience and in hope; hear him cry, "I have not attained, I follow on if I may reach the heights." Think of

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all this, and then of any one of us saying, "I have reached the limit of ambition, I am satisfied with what I am." Let us forget this letter before we say that. Rather let us be inspired by this letter to forget the past and set our faces anew toward the heights.

But discontent makes no progress. People spend their days lamenting their failure—and stand still. The years pass and find them just lamenting. The call of the heights is not to regret but to effort, and not to effort in the dark, but in the light. We hesitate when we do not see our goal. The call of the heights is not to some indefinite and mysterious striving; it is tangible and concrete "in Christ Jesus." "That I may know Him, and his fellowship," cries the man who sees the goal. Jesus Christ may be the best known personality of our experience. If he is not, why are we leaving our New Testaments unopened, and the gate of invitation untried? The highest sphere of thought and effort is the sphere of ethics and the spiritual life. Why should we think to master the highest easily when we must spend so much of time and strength making our own the lesser learning? A young man who would be successful in business or a profession gives years to eager toil in

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preparation, and years of intenser toil to the practise of his calling. The artist spends years in the study of the best art before any picture of his wins the attention of the world. He has turned from all inferior models and has steeped his soul in the spirit of the masters. One poem of Tennyson is quoted more often perhaps by thoughtful people than any other single poem of our language. Tennyson was seventeen years writing “In Memoriam.” It is to such thought of the worth of the ideal and the power of concentrated attention we are called in this appeal of the man who would reach the heights of character. Shall we give our years and our souls to the pursuit of business or of the artistic ideal, and shall we think to realize the high calling of God easily, with little attention or effort? Never poet or painter or man of affairs gave his energy to the perfecting of his art as did this artist in spirituality to the attainment of real fellowship with Jesus. The vision of what manhood may be lured him on to utmost intensity of desire and of effort, till he could say, “But one thing I do . . . I press on toward the goal, unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Following such leadership,

“We are treading where the saints have trod.”

THE CALL OF THE HEIGHTS

The men who have attained have heard the call of the heights, have set their faces toward the skies, and have given heart and strength to the pursuit of character.

PICTURES ON THE WALL

FINALLY, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

— LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

IV

PICTURES ON THE WALL

FURNISHING a home is a delightful experience. With what care a refined family choose the pictures which are to adorn the walls of the home! They will become part of the very life of those who dwell there. How well I know the first picture I helped to choose for the home of my childhood; it hangs now upon the wall of my little daughter's room — a sweet picture of Christ blessing the children.

Furnishing a mind with ideals, that is the great business of life. "Ideals," said Holland, "are the world's masters." As one thinketh in his heart, so is he. Thinking is the stuff deeds are made of. To develop the power of thought and direct it toward worthy objects is the end of education. "One's sole responsibility," says President King, "is to attend, to concentrate attention on those considerations which ought to prevail; then they will prevail and pass into act."

The writer of this beautiful letter com-

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mends some pictures to hang upon the walls of the soul's home: "Think on these things," says this psychologist before the psychologists. "Fix your attention here and you shall find as the outcome a life of honor and worth." Attention is selective; it is this our writer suggests. Select the material and direction of your thinking, he would urge. This is a purposed limitation of knowledge and experience. But is this not narrow? Ought we not to be hospitable in our thought, and cast out nothing until we have tested it? Paul has evidently heard something about a "narrow way that leadeth unto life." Is not the artist narrow who bids his pupils close the eyes to ugliness and deformity? Is he not narrow who visits famous galleries and stands long before renowned statues and paintings, and gives no time to vile caricatures? Is not Carlyle narrow in his advice about books, when he says they are divided into two classes, sheep and goats, the latter to be put resolutely on the left hand, "and tending, every goat of them, whither we know"? What shall we think of the scene Bunyan paints of the man running away from the city of Destruction with his fingers in his ears lest he hear the calls to return, and with his eyes fastened on a narrow wicket gate? Must he not be

narrow who chooses any Celestial City as his portion? We cannot have both the higher and the lower. Attention is selective. We do not have to turn the camera of the soul on every deformity we pass. We may reserve the films for scenes of beauty. We may "keep the heart with all diligence."

The negative process of resisting the devil by running away from him is incomplete. In our very haste we are likely to run into another devil, even as the man with his fingers in his ears fell into the Slough of Despond. If there are books we do not want as mental furnishing, if there are pictures we would not see on the walls of the soul, yet we must not have empty shelves and bare walls. We must fill the space with the good. Think on these things if you will be delivered from those things — our wise letter has in it the profoundest philosophy of the soul, and we are ready to look at the pictures it commends.

The first is truth, "Whatsoever things are true." Put truth in the foreground; it must furnish the fiber of character. Truth, not fact simply. You may get fact in the saloon and the slums; truth dwells in the light and air of heaven; it is not simply accord with fact, but accord with the Eternal. One of the finest descriptions of Jesus'

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mission is that of John, “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” With him came the vision of truth incarnate in a human life —

“And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds
More strong than all poetic thought.”

The psalmist caught the vision of the ideal man long before, and cried, “He speaketh the truth in his heart.” There is no worthy life that does not speak the truth in its heart. To make truth the ideal is to grow in strength and beauty.

The second picture named is the “honorable.” No English word quite expresses the fine thought of the original. Reverence is its root idea. It suggests the towering pile of the cathedral, and makes its plea for the high and holy, a plea surely which in our day needs to be heard. Among our modern discoveries and innovations there should be room still for some ideals which have stood the test of time. There is an old-fashioned honor which finds too scant courtesy in this day of frantic haste for material wealth. There are some books which we do well not to lay aside because another new novel is thrust before us; there are ancient courtesies of life worthy of attention

even when business presses; there are some hours and places which are ministers of grace, and which one may not safely despise. The lofty things of the spirit, the “honorable” must have place.

The things which are “just” are indeed included in the honorable, but our letter gives them special mention because so vastly important. Justice is perfect fairness. It is that quality whose lack leaves room for such social distress as the world is knowing in these days, when hard and fast lines are being drawn between classes, when the poor are crying out in sense of oppression, and toilers are demanding just recognition of their toil. Then the man whose ideal is justice, who has enthroned equity in his soul, may be the salvation of society. He may restore confidence, and establish peace, and cement brotherhood. Without him society becomes chaos.

One other picture must have special consideration, “Whatsoever things are pure”—the unsullied, the transparent, the clean. Probably the most marked characteristic of what we call heathenism is its impurity of thought and imagination and life. It finds expression even in heathen religions, and many temples are unfit for pure eyes to see. One cannot read the description of the vile-

ness which made life horrible in the heathen cities of Paul's day without shuddering. Thank God he cannot. And yet the allure-
ment of that same devil of impurity is on every side today. We need to hear again the old word (now sadly out of fashion) of the man who wrote this letter, "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be to you a father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." That is the final plea for purity — that we may come into the fellowship of God. The impure heart is the soiled lens which obscures the heavens. "The pure in heart shall see God." It is worth while to be clean for the sake of the vision.

The other pictures we may only name, "the lovely and of good report, the virtuous and praiseworthy." These will surely find place in the mind adorned by the true and the honorable, the just and the pure. And these together shall form the ideals of strong and beautiful lives.

Sir Philip Sidney, who lives as the type of the perfect gentleman, gave this definition of a gentleman, "High thoughts seated in a heart of courtesy." It is an echo of this call of the heights. Sir Philip Sidney illustrated its meaning on the field of Zut-

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phen, when as he lay dying he waived the draught of cold spring water, brought to quench his mortal thirst, in favor of a dying soldier, saying, "He needs it more than I." That was "lovely." That was the outflow of high thoughts seated in a heart of courtesy. That was like Him who gave Paul and Philip Sidney their conception of a gentleman, who said, "I thirst," and poured out his life for us all.

Character takes hue from thought. We are what we love.

"We live by admiration, hope, and love;
And, even as these are well and wisely fixed,
In dignity of being we ascend."

So Wordsworth has beautifully expressed the truth. Even more beautifully Paul: "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." Better still, because more simple, is the word of John: "We shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is."

THE GRACE OF GRATITUDE

BUT I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye have revived your thought for me. . . . Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. . . . Howbeit ye did well that ye had fellowship with my affliction. . . . But I have all things, and abound: I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things that came from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.

— LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

V

THE GRACE OF GRATITUDE

THE real heart of this beautiful letter is gratitude for kindness received. It was not written to tell the story of struggling saints, nor to preach a sermon on love, nor to set forth ethical ideals; it was written to say "Thank you."

The writer was in a Roman prison. Prison life was hard and wearisome. He had some liberty; he was allowed to preach in his prison, and that was joy; he might write letters to old friends, and that relieved his heart. But he longed for freedom and for fellowship. And his physical wants were ill supplied in prison. He writes to Timothy, whom he expects to visit him, to bring the cloak he left at Troas, and the books—"especially the books." The nights were chilly and he needed physical comfort; but the nights and days alike were lonely—more than his cloak he wanted his books.

Can you picture the joy that leaps up in his heart when he is told one day that a friend from Philippi has come to see him, and Epaph-

roditus bursts into his presence and throws his arms about him? Nor has this friend come empty-handed; he is the messenger of the Christian company at Philippi. They have loaded him with gifts for their old friend and teacher; they have supplied Paul's needs. But best of all they have sent their messenger, a friend to share for a time the solitude of the prison. It is the personal element that touches Paul most deeply. And so Epaphroditus stays and cheers his friend till he himself falls sick and comes "nigh unto death." With sickness comes homesickness, and Paul speeds him on his return home with this letter of tender love and gratitude — love and gratitude which repay the kindness received beyond any gift of gold.

The story offers some suggestions about kindness worth remembering. The kindness met the need of a man, faithful and true, who was giving himself for others. "I would not speak about my own want," Paul writes; "I shall get on well; I have learned to abound and to suffer, and in all to be content." They are the words of a modest man of high spirit, who would so much rather help somebody than be himself helped. But they suggest the pity of it — that any great loving soul should go unhelped in his own need,

and see the work he loves fail for want of help. The man who has gone to the front to fight our battles with heathenism, and who faces failure, though he would gladly give his life for success, because resources are so small and help so slow in coming, he is the man to whom our service is due that he may not fail. How his heart will sing in gratitude, as Paul's from his prison, for help rendered!

But kindness shown brings return. Back goes Epaphroditus bearing this letter of love, and manifold prayers for the welfare of the people who have helped. Can you not see them gather around their returning messenger with eager inquiry about all the details of the visit in Rome, with hearts open for every word he can tell them about the man they love so well, and the work he is doing even in prison? Can you not see that as their hearts are all drawn out toward this friend they are drawn very near together and inspired by a common joy? Can you not see how power is coming to that company through their very sacrifice in serving? And then they open the letter Epaphroditus has brought with him. Do you not think that sweet letter of love and gratitude was treasured with peculiar care as beyond any price? Else how do we come to possess it

at all? Do you not think the effort to practise its gentle precepts was the making of strong and beautiful character? I read that an old edition of a common book sold the other day in Boston for a thousand dollars. What do you think the original edition of the letter to the Philippians would be worth in the market? For how much do you think Christian people could afford to part with it in its present-day editions? Millions of copies of it are selling every year to eager buyers; but more than that, millions of people are growing sweeter in spirit and stronger in soul through reading it and entering into its secret. You might better lose to literature every book which has come from the press in the last quarter century of book-making than to lose this short letter of a thankful man. Because a company of saints ministered to a servant of Jesus Christ the whole Christian world has for centuries been debtor, and has rejoiced in one of the worthiest pages ever added to the spiritual inspiration of the race. "Give, and it shall be given unto you."

Beyond all this, the kindness shown the prisoner rejoiced the heart of the Eternal Lover. It was "an odor of a sweet smell, well-pleasing to God," says Paul. For was not this prisoner serving the King Eternal?

THE GRACE OF GRATITUDE

And was not the spiritual growth of these givers dear to him who gave himself that men might share his spirit of self-giving? It was a threefold ministry this kindness wrought — the joy of Paul, the reaction of gladness and growth in the givers, and the pleasing of the Great Friend of all. For that Friend is linked in his friendship in such vital relations with his humblest servants that any kindness shown to them is shown to him. A cup of cold water to a thirsty child of his refreshes him. “Ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren — ye have done it unto me.” How marvelous is the reach of kindness! We thought we were helping an obscure child, and lo, the King in his glory is enriched.

Sir Launfal, who has shared his crust and cup with the leper, hears this word:

“ In many climes, without avail,
Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail ;
Behold, it is here, — this cup which thou
Didst fill at the streamlet for me but now ;
This crust is my body broken for thee,
This water His blood that died on the tree ;
The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,
In whatso we share with another’s need ;

Who gives himself with his alms feeds three—
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and Me.”

UNFAILING RESOURCES

IN nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. . . . And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. . . . The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

— LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

VI

UNFAILING RESOURCES

THE letter which began with, “Grace to you and peace,” closes with, “Peace to you and grace.” As Dr. Jowett has said, “It is a little volume of graciousness bound within the covers of grace.” Itself is guarded by the peace of God, as it prays its recipients may be.

To what heights it calls! In what a spirit it bids men live! What thinking it would put into our minds, and what service into our lives! Are there resources for such a life as is here unfolded to the vision, or must it be called simply visionary? It would seem as though the writer of the letter anticipated such questioning and answered it for all time. There are abundant resources for the life of the spirit. Indeed there are abundant resources for life in all its relations. We are needlessly anxious about material supplies: “Wherewithal shall we be clothed and fed? How shall we furnish the finance of the Church and the Christian enterprise? Are not the demands too great,

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and the calls too urgent?" We forget that this is God's world, infinitely rich, and that all things are the heritage of his people. It is ours to use our Father's wealth in his gracious work.

This Philippian people could send "once and again" unto Paul's need, and to forward his work. "In much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" when once they "gave their own selves to the Lord." They had no suspicion of the possibility of such material resources as abound among Christians of today, but they used what they had, and had always abundance. It is not of this, however, Paul writes in these closing words. He is thinking of the larger resources of the life of the spirit, which make possible and actual all generous planning and helping and living.

Material resources are of very little value unless we have learned to estimate and interpret their worth in the light of God's grace and in the spirit of God's peace. It is when we have entered into the secret of the divine fellowship and h learned the meaning of prayer, and have . l in answer to it the peace which passeth all understanding, and have had our spirits bathed in the grace of Jesus Christ, that we realize the sig-

nificance of all human resources. Paul passes very lightly over material resources, even in sending thanks for material gifts, as he hastens to unfold the infinite resources of grace. He would have these friends "always rejoicing"; wherein shall they find joy amid all trials? He would have them "anxious for nothing"; how shall they be rid of anxiety when the common burdens of life press and the cares of today lap over upon tomorrow? He would have them filled with peace, while the world in which they live is filled with hurry and confusion; where shall they find abiding peace?

And the answer is — the open door of prayer. The resources of the Christian are the resources of the Eternal freely placed at the disposal of his trusting children. This man in his Roman prison is poor; he has none of the material resources on which men so count. He "has suffered the loss of all things" that he might serve Christ. Yet what a princely dispenser of untold wealth he is. He can give no penny to repay benefits received, but with the quiet dignity of the man of ~~milli~~^{millions} he writes his check on the bank of the Eternal, "My God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Paul had tested these resources for himself. In the

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day of his deep need he had heard the voice saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and he had found it sufficient. He had found his day of need a day of glorying, his day of weakness a day of strength. He knew the value of the check he gave. Some of us have not tested the resources available. This story is told of an old Indian who begged for food in a western town long years ago. He carried by a string about his neck a dirty pouch in which was a "charm" given him in early days. On investigation the "charm" proved to be a discharge from the Federal army, signed by George Washington, and entitling the Indian to a life pension. So we go in poverty and know not the value of the promises of God. Why should we be anxious about resources? God is not poor; God has not failed; God is not deaf. "My God shall supply every need of yours."

And so the sentinels of peace come to "guard the heart and the thoughts." If the other was the picture of a bank, this is the picture of a battle-field, and peace is on guard. Peace is not something for which we must flee from the conflicts of life to the mountains. Peace comes into the conflict; when life is surrounded by foes and fears, when temptations and terrors are in the way,

then is the time for the realization of the old promise, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee.” Mr. Gladstone, amid the distracting cares and conflicts of government, kept that word where his eyes might rest upon it the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning, and calmly did his work. But one says, “Mr. Gladstone was strong enough to meet the conditions; he could keep his mind ‘stayed’; my very trouble is the wandering mind.” Then I like Paul’s word better—“The peace of God shall guard your hearts and your thoughts.” If peace keeps the steady mind, peace keeps the mind steady. Peace stands at the door, a guard to keep off the fears and foes. It is God’s peace, and is greater and stronger than we know:

“And I smiled to think God’s greatness flowed about our incompleteness,
Round our restlessness his rest.”

And so the letter ends with that gracious apostolic benediction, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” You cannot define grace; it is one of those ultimate words which defy definition, like “God,” and “love,” and “truth.” But you can know grace in experience; the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ may abide

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with your spirit, a fountain of peace and of power.

The man who wrote this brave letter from his Roman prison, who in darkness and poverty and dependence sang such songs of comfort and joy as still echo in the hearts of earth's prisoners, went out from his own prison to the headsman's block and the death of the martyr. Did he go weeping, fearing, despairing? Did he say, "God has forsaken me; hope faileth"? We know the words that were on his lips as the end drew near: "I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day." He heard and was ready to answer the call of the heights. The peace of God guarded his heart and his thoughts. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ was with his spirit.



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